DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 118 084 95 IR 002 985

AUTHOR Darby, Keith
TITLE Programming as an Instrument for Community Involvement: Designing Topical Television Programs for Rural Adult Audiences. Satellite Technology Demonstration Technical Report No. 0503.
INSTITUTION Federation of Rocky Mountain States, Inc., Denver, Colo.
SPONS AGENCY National Inst. of Education (DHEW), Washington, D.C.
REPORT NO STD-TR-0503
PUB DATE 75
NOTE 14p.

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage
DESCRIPTORS *Adult Education; Audiences; *Communication Satellites; *Community Education; Community Involvement; Delivery Systems; Demonstration Projects; Educational Television; Program Evaluation; *Programing (Broadcast); Public Television; Regional Programs; *Rural Education; Surveys; Telecommunication
IDENTIFIERS *Satellite Technology Demonstration

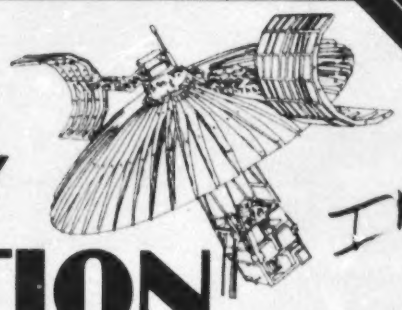
ABSTRACT

The overall objective of the Satellite Technology Demonstration (STD) was to test the feasibility of delivering television Programing via satellite to isolated, rural locations. Community members at various STD sites were surveyed to determine how they felt about a variety of topics which were planned for an adult evening series. Topics in education, consumer affairs, health, and environment proved to be of interest, and a series of 12 programs, 40 minutes each with a 19 minute local question-and-answer segment, was designed and broadcast to STD receivers located in local junior high schools. Audience reactions were positive, but it was concluded that more interest could be generated if programs were of more specific local interest. (EMH)

****
* Documents acquired by ERIC include many informal unpublished *
* materials not available from other sources. ERIC makes every effort *
* to obtain the best copy available. Nevertheless, items of marginal *
* reproducibility are often encountered and this affects the quality *
* of the microfiche and hardcopy reproductions ERIC makes available *
* via the ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS). EDRS is not *
* responsible for the quality of the original document. Reproductions *
* supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made from the original. *
****

ED118084

SATELLITE TECHNOLOGY DEMONSTRATION



FEDERATION OF ROCKY MOUNTAIN STATES, INC.

technical report

TR0503

PROGRAMMING AS AN INSTRUMENT FOR COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT: DESIGNING TOPICAL TELEVISION PROGRAMS FOR RURAL ADULT AUDIENCES

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

KEITH DARBY

IR002985

INTRODUCTION

The overall objective of the Satellite Technology Demonstration (STD) was to test the feasibility of delivering television programming via satellite to rural-isolated locations. The STD's Utilization Component, or field services arm, surveyed community members at STD sites to determine how they felt about a variety of program topics, which were planned for an adult evening series.

This survey indicated that the community members were interested in the STD, but they had certain reservations. For example, they stipulated that the programs should be varied; programs should be broken into series, ranging from one to seven programs; and that generally no attempt should be made to maintain total community participation throughout the school year.

The community members also suggested topics for the series: Land Use and the Environment, Consumer Affairs, Health Care, Child Development, Do-It-Yourself Courses, Alcohol and Drug Abuse, Old Age, Western Heritage and Culture, and Rural-Urban Issues. Interestingly, they did not think career development (the main thrust of the STD's programming) would be acceptable to adults over an extended period. Based on the survey information gathered by field services personnel, the STD management decided there was sufficient interest from the communities on certain topics to warrant proceeding with an evening program series. The task of designing and implementing an evening series was given to the STD's Program Component.

The Program Component was already developing a day time series on career education. Development of the evening series was quite different. The career education series was aimed at junior high school students, was educational in content, and was to be broadcast during school hours and, thus, to a "captive" audience. The night time series, however, was developed for an adult audience. The content was varied and the series was to be broadcast in the evening--thus placing it in direct competition with programs available on a standard television receiver. Moreover, the audience would have to travel from their homes to view the programs on the special STD receiver, located at the local junior high school.

The series had several aims. First, the STD hoped that by providing programs for adults, community members would be motivated to take a deeper interest in the programs broadcast to their children. Second, by producing programs of specific interest to rural-isolated areas, communities might be encouraged to work together on common problems. Third, by delivering programs via satellite, distant communities might be able to use modern communications technology to solve regional problems.

Preliminary Program Development

In January, 1974, representatives from all STD components (Utilization, Programming, Broadcast and Engineering, and Research) attended a meeting to discuss the evening program series. Several decisions were made: (1) A series of 12 programs, 40 minutes each, would be developed; (2) The public television stations (PTS) would be encouraged to broadcast the full 40 minutes, followed by a 19-minute local question-and-answer segment. This would make each PTS program 59 minutes in length; (3) The programs would be broadcast to participating STD sites in two "footprints," or two separate time periods on Thursdays; and (4) Audience interaction at the STD's Intensive Terminal sites, which had two-way audio capability, would be an integral part of all evening programming.

From field services input, several program topics were selected for the evening series. In addition, 60 topics were selected for the STD's Materials Distribution Service (MDS). These were to be broadcast via Applications Technology Satellite-6 (ATS-6) in normal MDS time periods, but designated for evening audience use.

A subsequent meeting held in late January, 1974, enabled the Programming Component to produce a document outlining a broad form of the evening programs. At this time, input from the Utilization and Broadcast and Engineering Components led Programming to recommend that programs be broadcast on a three-week cycle for no more than 40 minutes each. Field service personnel indicated that adults at STD sites would not be interested in weekly broadcasts.

Available satellite time for the evening series, after all other commitments had been met, amounted to 40 minutes for each program. The Thursday broadcast schedule was retained

from the previous meeting, as were the suggested topics. In addition to the accepted topics, two more were proposed: Income Tax and A Governors' Forum, the latter being a panel of the Governors representing participating states of the Federation of Rocky Mountain States, Inc.

The general format defined at this time consisted of a moderator, two guest experts, existing material inserts, and live interaction. The moderator appeared in all 12 programs and thus served as a "unifying" element.

A breakdown of MDS items also was determined. Ten films were solicited in the following topics: Land Use; Consumerism; Health; Old Age; Alcohol and Drug Abuse; and Western Heritage and Culture. Titles and descriptions would be published in a catalog specifically designed for the adult program series.

To implement the series, the STD developed a program design team, consisting of an Executive Producer, Director, Administrative Assistant, Content Coordinator, Reference Specialist, and field services personnel. Also included was a Print Media Specialist, who would prepare supporting print materials. Program implementation responsibilities would be shared equally by the Executive Producer of the junior high school series, a Unit Director of the evening series, and the MDS coordinator.

The content structure was defined by February 15, 1974. Production would commence in September. It was felt that the nature of the programs precluded field evaluation of the scripts. The total projected budget was $11,410.00

On March 22, 1974, descriptions of the evening program series were sent to STD Coordinators in each state; the coordinators were asked to return all comments and suggestions to the STD's headquarters in Denver by April 3, 1974. Reaction from the states was mixed. Some coordinators felt that they would need to see actual scripts before making final judgment. In general, the comments tended to be discouraging, indicating that the series, as described, would not succeed in drawing an audience.

At this time (early April, 1974), the Associate Director of Programming indicated that he would be unable to act as producer on the evening series, owing to other work pressures. At a meeting between Utilization and Programming representatives, a decision was reached to assign production responsibilities to Programming's Operations Manager; television direction to a unit director; and coordinating assistance to a field services researcher.

PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION

Program Topics

At the point of the production unit change, the lineup of programs was: STD Preview; Rural-Urban Affairs; Agriculture and Conservation; Career Education; Governors' Forum; Early Childhood; Rocky Mountain Culture; Meet A Personality; For the Aging; STD Wrapup; and, as an alternate, Environment.

A review of the program descriptions by the new production team concluded that the programs, as described, were not in a form conducive to television production. They were trite and rhetorical and gave no indication of what the program treatment should be. A review of input from the state coordinators reinforced this view.

Each topic was reconsidered according to the following criteria:

1. Did the topics reflect user input, as gathered by Utilization?
2. Did the series schedule consider local events and conditions vis-a-vis attracting and holding an audience?
3. How could the topics be arranged into a television format?

Having reviewed the situation, the production unit decided to develop a new program schedule, based on the specified criteria. This new schedule was sent to STD state coordinators, Project management, and Utilization, Research, and Broadcast and Engineering directors.

By May 24, 1974, the only topic that was undefined was Conservation. Input was requested on this topic from STD participants in the states and from the state agricultural commissions. Reaction to the proposed programs was requested by June 1, 1974. This new proposal reduced the number of programs to 100. Owing to the nature of the first program (STD Preview), which was an overview of the STD, it was felt that delaying broadcast until September 26, 1974--the first evening broadcast date--would reduce the effectiveness of the entire program series. STD Preview was, therefore, deleted from the evening series. The other deletion was the alternate program (the Environment).

By June 1, 1974, no negative feedback had been received on the new proposal. Replies on the Conservation program were received from the state agricultural departments. These replies

indicated that strip-mining and allied land-use problems were prime interests. A telephone poll of the state coordinators by the Utilization Component indicated general acceptance of the topics and proposed broadcast dates. Following this poll, a sign-off was obtained from the STD management to proceed with the revised evening series topics.

Program Length

Reducing the number of programs in the evening series to 10 enabled the evening program production unit to review individual program lengths. Forty minutes was an awkward length: If public television stations were to fill an hour broadcast slot, then they had to produce 20 minutes of programming locally. This requirement would necessitate a large commitment in time, facilities, and funds. Also, it was a short period in which to provide in-depth information on a topic and still leave sufficient time for meaningful exchange between the Intensive Terminal (IT) sites and Denver. Further, if viewers at the sites traveled several miles to view the programs, it was felt that any program less than 60 minutes in length might not be "attractive" to them; in other words, the viewers would not leave their homes to see the programs.

The possibility of a 60-minute program length was discussed with the Broadcast and Engineering (B&E) Component. B&E indicated no extra satellite time was available, but the reduction in listed series length made plausible a 50-minute individual program length. This length was acceptable to Project management. The extra length meant that public television stations would have only 10 minutes of local material to produce for an hour time slot and also that IT sites would have more time for interaction. However, there was still concern about attracting and holding an audience with that program length.

Additional Services

Three things were needed to attract and hold audiences at rural-isolated sites: (1) high-quality programs; (2) a public information campaign; and (3) community involvement.

It was assumed that the programs would be of the highest quality. The STD's first task, then, was to implement a public information campaign. Posters were developed, printed, and send to each site. Flyers were produced in English and Spanish for distribution via site schools. Press releases were issued to local site newspapers. Copy for publicity was supplied by the evening program production unit.

The second task, community involvement, was more difficult. Assigned to the STD's Utilization Component in early 1974, this task culminated in a position paper entitled, "Secondary Audience Participation Plan." In brief, the plan called for community activities centering on the evening programs, the evening Materials Distribution Service, and a list of resources for each program topic. The plan also distributed the major responsibilities for structuring these activities among STD site coordinators, state coordinators, and field services personnel. Further, the plan called for developing a catalog of evening activities. The catalog would include program titles; descriptions and broadcast times; MDS film descriptions and numbers; and lists of resources with names, addresses, and telephone numbers of persons and agencies willing to participate in followup activities on any program topic.

Evening Program Series Title

Though individual program titles had been determined by the production unit, an "umbrella" title was needed to give continuity to publicity materials and to identify the programs with the STD. A competition conducted among the STD staff produced the title, "Footprints." This title not only represented the satellite transmission pattern, but also suggested the object of each program treatment--to provide a lead to communities in coping with some of the areas' problems.

The Public Television Stations

The broadcast schedule, as defined, was suitable for all STD "closed-circuit" sites, but posed a problem for the sites that were part of the public television (PTV) station network. It was difficult to develop a series consisting of 50-minute programs at three-week intervals for the PTV stations. First, the PTV stations' educational programs ran concurrently with the STD's programs; this had an adverse effect not only on program continuity, but also on audience loyalty. Second, the 50-minute programs required each PTV station to allocate additional time, money, and facilities to the transmissions.

Because the PTV stations were not anxious to make these additional allocations, the STD's Program Component suggested that the stations record each "Footprints" program and

broadcast the series on a weekly schedule starting in the middle of March, 1975. The PTV stations then asked if the programs could be formulated to allow a cutaway point at 28 minutes, 30 seconds. The STD agreed to attempt to do this, though such a procedure would not be possible on two of the programs--Culture and the Governors' Forum.

The Culture program was to be prerecorded and produced as a special. The Governors' Forum was to be completely interactive, with no natural cutaway point. The PTV stations accepted this situation and agreed to a cutaway point for the other eight programs.

Program Production

Final Format

Apart from the two exeptions noted, the format for the programs was: (1) opening title sequence; (2) prerecorded topic exposition; (3) interaction; and (4) closing sequence.

Opening titles consisted of filmed mountain scenes with the STD logo superimposed in the left-hand corner and organization credits superimposed to the right. The sequence lasted 40 seconds and was accompanied by a music track of "The Old Man's Last Ride," known at the STD by its opening line, "These Are My Rocky Mountains." The closing sequence employed the same material but of shorter duration.

Program Moderator

In keeping with the original proposal, it was decided to engage one person to act as moderator for the series. That person needed to be a professional, used to performing before television cameras. It would also help the economics of the series if that person could be from Denver, thus eliminating costly travel and hotel bills.

The first program concerned consumerism, and the man chosen to narrate the prerecorded segment was Dave Minshall, consumer reporter for KOA-TV in Denver. At that time he was, in effect, the only reporter who consistently reported on consumer affairs. During the filming of the segment for the consumer program, it became evident to the production unit that Minshall met the criteria for the series moderator. He was professional, amiable, and knowledgeable. Consultation with Minshall confirmed his desire to undertake the task. Minshall became moderator for the program series.

Prerecorded Segments

These varied in length. Duration depended on: (1) topic treatment; (2) existing film/tape footage available; and (3) availability of a film crew.

Existing Footage

The list of contacts compiled for the "Footprints" publication also served in the search for existing footage associated with each topic. Films previewed were screened for production quality, suitability of content, and applicability to the Rocky Mountain region.

Most footage was obtained from organizations directly linked to the topic; e.g., for the program on aging, film was obtained from the National Council for Senior Citizens. The notable exception was the program, "For Purple Mountain Majesty," dealing with Rocky Mountain culture. The STD contacted the PTV stations and asked them to provide 16mm films and 2-inch videotapes that were suitable to the topic; about seven titles were submitted. Other material for this program was obtained from two local commercial stations--KBTV, Denver, and KMGH, Denver. Only two segments of existing material were paid for--a segment from KMGH for the culture program and a segment from Appleshop Films of Kentucky for the medical program, "Is There a Doctor in the County?" Total cost for existing material for the series was $200 for 15 minutes of film.

New Prerecorded Segments

A total of 70 minutes of film produced by the STD was used in the "Footprints" series. Film for the third program, "The Great Land Race," was produced on location in Rock Springs, Wyoming.

A total of 60 minutes of videotape segments were used in the series. Of that 60 minutes, a half-hour was taken from a two-hour taped session with Mr. Rogers at the WQED studios in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

Exceptions to Format

There were three exceptions to the above format:

1. The second program, "The Space Between Us," was prerecorded, and interactive segments were alternated throughout the program.

2. The fourth program, "Purple Mountain Majesty," was more entertaining than informational because it was scheduled close to Christmas--December 19, 1974; the "Footprints" production unit suggested that the sites use the program as the basis for a community Christmas gathering.

3. The 10th program, "Brass Tacks," was a completely interactive program, featuring representatives from the eight-state area; originally called the Governors' Forum, the program was changed when only two governors indicated their ability to participate. The guests actually present for the program ranged from a state senator to participating site coordinators.

Interaction

The prerecorded segments of each program were structured so that questions would be raised in the viewers' minds. At the conclusion of these segments, the moderator made a summary statement and introduced the guests. Each guest was then asked to make a brief statement on issues mentioned in the exposition segment. The moderator alerted sites that they would be called for interaction following a brief discussion by the panel. One site from each state was called for the first group of questions. On completion of their interaction, a second site in each state was called. If time allowed, sites were called again to add any final comments.

Materials Distribution Service (MDS)

Titles for the MDS associated with "Footprints" were sought by the MDS coordinator during the early stages of program development. The task differed from that which was originally proposed. An STD managerial directive was issued which stated that all MDS programs for "Footprints" should be acquired at no cost.

Many agencies and distributors of free films were contacted. Films were received for preview, and a final list of 37 films compiled. Further search and preview revealed no further titles applicable to the scheduled topics. However, the Encyclopaedia Britannica and Great Plains Television Libraries did contain suitable material. Permission was granted by these companies to use films on the "Footprints" MDS under the same agreement as the normal MDS.

Reasons for Nonparticipation

Site coordinators stated they had difficulty in attracting an audience for the "Footprints" series, owing to commercial television competition; inclement weather, and lack of interest. Further, the time between broadcasts--three weeks--resulted in interest in the new topic and lack of interest in topics past. It is not known if any audience member ever saw the MDS catalog or was aware of the service.

Program Acceptance

According to STD Research Component data on "Footprints" programs numbers one through eight inclusive, the programs were highly accepted by viewers in the closed-circuit sites: On the programs as a whole, 48.8 percent found them pleasing; 72.5 percent found them helpful. On the interaction portions, 41.5 percent found them pleasing; 60.1 percent found them helpful. About 84 percent of the viewing audience thought the series should be continued. Twelve public television stations in the eight-state area had the capability of receiving the "Footprints" broadcast. Of these 12 stations, seven carried the programs, but only the New Mexico stations carried programs live; i.e., KNME, Albuquerque, and KENW, Portales. Of the other five stations, KUAT, Tucson, Arizona, and KLVX, Las Vegas, Nevada, carried the programs in prime time--KUAT at 6:00 p.m. Sunday, and KLVX at 7:00 p.m. Saturday. The "Footprints" unit received no comment from any of these stations on program acceptability.

Program Operation

Site Audiences

In spite of the publicity about the "Footprints" programs--posters, flyers, and press releases--sites had difficulty in attracting audiences. The reasons given were: (1) publicity material arrived too late; (2) some sites were able to view the programs at home; (3) conflict with other community events--basketball, etc.; (4) commercial television competition; (5) lack of interest; and (6) time change of broadcasts.*

*Part way through the series, the National Aeronautics and Space Administration informed the STD that "Footprints" would be scheduled to start at 8:00 p.m., MST. Prior to that programs had been broadcast starting at 7:30 p.m., MST. Some sites found that viewers considered the 8:00 p.m. start inconvenient.

Program Guests

Three guests usually participated in each program; a greater number would have slowed the pace of interaction as more time would have been needed to answer questions. During research of each program, people knowledgeable on a topic were consulted by the "Footprints" production unit. In many cases, suitable guests were selected from these people. In other cases, names of possible guests were suggested by the persons consulted.

Owing to budget limitations, most guests were from Colorado, but every effort was made to obtain guests from other states, especially when the topic was of significance to an area. When guests were obtained from Colorado, they were chosen for a knowledge of the topic and an awareness of the problems in the entire region. When it was impossible to bring guests from an area displaying special interest in a topic, guests were invited to attend an Intensive Terminal site, thus making them available for input during the interactive segments.

Assessment

Though the series had been devised as a vehicle for encouraging community involvement, the purpose of each program was to provide information and guidance to the viewer in coping with a variety of problems of interest to the area. The format was designed to inform rather than to entertain; and, based on STD research figures, the series met its goal.

The research data revealed that the total program was: helpful, 72.5 percent; pleasing, 48.8 percent; somewhat worthwhile, 4.9 percent; and insignificant, .8 percent. The interactive segment was: helpful, 60.1 percent; pleasing, 41.5 percent; somewhat worthwhile, 7.7 percent; and insignificant, .8 percent. About 84 percent stated they wanted the series to continue.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. There was some criticism that topic treatment was too general. The observation has validity, but it is impossible to be site specific when broadcasting to an eight-state area. There is evidently a need for a "Footprints" type of series, but on a more localized level.

2. Budget limitations prevented filming of actual examples of problems prevalent in the area. This limitation resulted in a generalized appearance to the programs. More money is required--not only to illustrate the point of each program, but also to bring into the studio guests from a particular problem area.
3. Larger audiences would probably be attracted to the programs if film of sites and site residents were included in the presentation. Credibility would be enhanced if the viewer knew that the program producers had seen the problem first hand.
4. A community representative solely responsible for coordinating local activities would help in attracting audiences. It would be that person's responsibility to: inform program producers of types of special interest to the community; publicize the program series; be aware of community action on topics and contact persons to organize citizen involvement groups; and contact persons and agencies who could continue activity from the broadcast program.
5. Input from the sites constantly reiterated the need for more interaction time. A good program length would probably be 90 minutes. Two-way video would also be valuable in the interactive segment and would help attract and hold audiences.
6. Frequency of broadcasts would need to be determined by soliciting further input from the sites. Sites originally stated their opposition to a schedule involving regular participation. If programs were more site specific, a one a month schedule would perhaps suffice.

Summary

It would appear that there is a need for a "Footprints" type series in rural-isolated areas of the Rockies. The current series went part way to fulfilling that need, but specificity is desirable. To achieve specificity, much more money would be required; money for film, travel, and a larger staff. Perhaps the ultimate question is: "Is the need great enough that the sites would be prepared to make some financial contribution to fill that need." If the answer is positive, then future "Footprints" efforts should be developed and implemented.